

ABC NIGHTLINE
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KOPPEL: Joining us live now here in our Washington bureau is Cuba's top-ranking diplomat in the United States, the head of the Cuban Interest Section in Washington, Ramon Sanchez-Parodi. And with us again from New York, Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick. Mr. Sanchez-Parodi, it is always said when young men have to die in combat from any country--some of yours have died, some of ours have died--now that it's all over, what has been gained, what has been lost? RAMON SANCHEZ-PARODI (Cuban Interests Section): Well, I think really we cannot tell as a talk about anything that has been gained, uh, other than the fact that the world public opinion has expressed its, uh, this verdict, this decision in favor of the principles of international law, of, uh, the standards of the behavior of the international community. I think that if anything out of this, uh, dramatic, uh, experience is what, uh, we can only say has been gained by this intervention, military intervention in Grenada by the United States.

KOPPEL: One of, one of the things that you have to do in this country, one of your functions here is to assess the mood, however, of American public opinion and report back to your government. Uh, give us the benefit of what you've been telling your government. SANCHEZ-PARODI: Well, what I've been telling, uh, my government is the fact that, uh, we have seen a lot of, uh, manipulation of the information regarding this operation in Grenada. Uh, from the very beginning, we, we have seen how, uh, the press, the media through which, uh, the, the population is informed about the events and about the decisions taken and the way that they have been taken, uh, have been complaining a lot as to the way this has been handled, the, the kind of almost censorship that has been imposed on them. And the fact that, uh, what the population in the United States has been hearing about events in Grenada and about the world reaction to, uh, to these actions in Grenada has been, uh, greatly manipulated, I believe, by, by officials.

KOPPEL: Well, it's, it's, it's reassuring us somewhat in Congress to hear a representative of the Cuban government come out in favor of freedom of the press, but I'm still wondering what it is you're reporting to your government as to American public opinion. SANCHEZ-PARODI: Well, this is precisely what I've been, uh, reporting. The way that, uh, this has been manipulated, and the way that, uh, public opinion have (sic) been led to, to think about events, and the way that official sources have been, uh, handling this information regarding events in Grenada.

KOPPEL: Let's take a look at the shape of how things look in the Caribbean today, as compared to how they were a couple of weeks ago. Would you agree that Cuba has suffered a setback? SANCHEZ-PARODI: No, I don't think so. I think quite the contrary. I think that, uh, Cuba's prestige, Cuba's standing among, uh, several nations, even among developed nations, and generally in the world, has been enhanced by the response, the way, the consistent way in which Cuba has, uh, expressed its position regarding these events in Grenada. It has been enhanced by, by the way that our workers, our technical personnel, our, even our diplomats have, uh, reacted in Grenada in face of the invasion. I think that, uh, counts more than, uh, any, uh, a, a temporary military, a setback, let's say.

KOPPEL: Ambassador Kirkpatrick, give me your assessment, would you? How have things changed, if at all, over the past two weeks in the Caribbean? KIRKPATRICK: Well, they've changed very dramatically, of course. They, first of all, we've seen the first reversal of a so-called irreversible revolution since the Brezhnev doctrine was enunciated after the Czechoslovak spring in 1968. A, a country which had been effectively claimed and taken by the Soviet empire, of whom Cuba is a principal agent,

CONTINUED

2.

uh, and which had become a base for the projection of Soviet military power, of which Cuba is a principal agent, was lost to them. And that was a very strategically located country, uh, which was on one side of the most important sea lanes through which ships, every ship leaving the Panama Canal for the south Atlantic must pass. An extremely strategically located island designed to serve as a base for the Cuban conquest of the eastern Caribbean.

KOPPEL: Isn't that, isn't that a rather grandiose assessment when, uh, even your own administration admits that of the 700-some-odd Cubans who were there, all but about 50 were indeed construction workers. KIRKPATRICK: Ha. Some workers. Uh, you know, I can't resist this, I'm sorry. But that's not my administration, that's our government. Uh...

KOPPEL: Well, you're a member of the administration and that's our government.

KIRKPATRICK: That's right, and you're a member of our government. I mean, we're all parts of that government. We're citizens or, or officials of it. Uh, the, those workers turned out to have been, of course, very well trained, very ferocious, uh, fighters in the Cuban military, and the so-called tourist airport that they were constructing turned out to have been, uh, a very important military base which was armed absolutely to the teeth. That's, uh, ready to receive thousands, in fact, of, probably of Cuban and Soviet block personnel. Uh, six or seven warehouses of sophisticated weapons, ammunition, some old ones, but mainly new ones. This was a very strategically important territory. Now it wasn't just a territory, it was also a place where people live--110,000 Grenadans, and whose freedom had been denied and who had become progressively objects of totalitarian control and repression.

KOPPEL: Mr. Sanchez-Parodi, I saw you shaking your head there as, as Ambassador Kirkpatrick was going through her assessment. Why? SANCHEZ-PARODI: Well, first because it was, uh, was completely rhetorical, it was baseless, it was against the facts, the real facts, the complete facts that we have been saying, that, uh, the overwhelming and majority of, uh, citizens there, especially those who were at the airport, were, and our construction workers, it would be very easily for, for any journalist with access to them to, to assess, uh, quite clearly that they are construction workers.

KOPPEL: Construction, construction workers they may have been, but they weren't armed with shovels. SANCHEZ-PARODI: They, they were armed with light infantry weapons that the Maurice Bishop government issue them in face of the threat of an American invasion, which took place. And, let me add, by the way, the only troops that have used this airport, the only country that has used this airport for military purposes is the United States.

KOPPEL: But we're talking about a time warp here, I mean, the, the, the... SANCHEZ-PARODI: Well, time warp imposed by the United States.

KOPPEL: The airport was, the airport, the airstrip was never completed.

SANCHEZ-PARODI: (speaking simultaneously with Koppel) United States has occupied that, occupied... They, they, United States troops is occupying that territory and that country at this moment, imposing its, uh, will on that territory by, by force, and this has con, been condemned by the, uh, international community, and those facts, those are facts. Those are not merely rhetorical, uh, statements, but those are facts, and we have facts that I believe should be faced by this government.

CONTINUED

3.

KIRKPATRICK: The international community also called for free elections of a new Grenadian government, which will take place in the very near future. By the way, the United States voted for that resolution. Cubans not only tried to cut off debate today to prevent discussion of the merits of this case, but even to prevent the presentation of an amendment that called for free elections of a new Grenadian government. Now, we understand that since they, of course, don't permit free elections in their own country. SANCHEZ-PARODI: Well, it's very difficult, it's very difficult to... KIRKPATRICK: Neither, by the way, do they permit access to the media. SANCHEZ-PARODI: ...Have any free elections in a country which is occupied by foreign military forces.

KOPPEL: All right. Let's take a break, and when we come back, uh, Mr. Sanchez-Parodi, we'll examine the last point you just made, in light of the fact American troops, we are told, are in the process of leaving. We'll be back with more of our discussion in a moment.

KOPPEL: Joining us again now from Washington, Cuban diplomat Ramon Sanchez-Parodi and from New York, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick. Mr. Sanchez-Parodi, we are told tonight that Secretary Weinberger says U.S. troops are in the process of being withdrawn, probably will be completely withdrawn in a matter of a few days. The United States has come out squarely in favor of self-determination for the Grenadian people. You can't object to that, can you? SANCHEZ-PARODI: No, no, not at all. In fact, I think that the, the United States should, ah, withdraw its troops immediately. In the first place, the United States never should have gone with its military forces into Grenada. We're speaking of a country that's 27,000 times the size of Grenada, that has 2,300 times the population of Grenada and it's called a threat, dangerous threat to U.S. national, ah, national security. I don't understand it.

KOPPEL: First, first of all, it wasn't, it wasn't called that. And I, I guess what the concern was was not so much over the Grenadians as over the Cubans and the Bulgarians and the North Koreans and the East Germans and the Soviets. You had, you had quite a collection there. SANCHEZ-PARODI: The Cuban, the Cuban construction workers who were there building an airport, an airport whose management was to be under a business firm, the Cubans, medical doctors who were there, who were there providing health services to the Grenadians, the Cuban fishermen who were there helping and teaching the Grenadians to, to fish, those people were dangerous? I, I, I cannot understand how and why were they dangerous in any way? Not even, not even, not even the military mission, the 20-some officers who were there teaching the Grenadians how and helping and assisting the Grenadians...(inaudible)...the Grenadians how to defend themselves from a, an external aggression, an invasion which finally took place and was a U.S. invasion.

KOPPEL: Ambassador Kirkpatrick? KIRKPATRICK: That's just absolutely outrageous, you know?

KOPPEL: What is? KIRKPATRICK: Well, what he's saying. It's just absolutely outrageous. What the Cubans and the Soviet bloc were doing there was building really major military bases and doing what they usually do, building infrastructure first with, you know, this very large airport. And by the way, they had plans for a deep-water port as well. They had, they had built under this so-called tourist airport an, a military base which was already very heavily armed. There was a Cuban

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4.

enclave, in fact, from which Grenadians were virtually absent. They Cubans had already taken over the military management of the island and, and almost, and were directly involved in the government of the island. They were always present in the, in cabinet meetings and decision processes. They had already made the Grenadians a kind of, ah, kind of colony. And the Grenadians are very happy to see them go. The Grenadians don't think the Americans are doing to stay, which indeed we're not. You know, the fact is this was not an invasion; it was a rescue operation, and the Grenadians know that.

KOPPEL: Mr. Sanchez-Parodi, you were kind enough to express your interest in the, in the ability of the, of the free press to have access to Grenada. Over the past few days ago, I mean over the past few days it has had that access, and indeed, if one thing emerges from the reports that we've been hearing, it is quite clearly that the Grenadians are quite happy to see you folks go. Why do you think that is?

SANCHEZ-PARODI: Well, I have not been in Grenada, and I don't know exactly that this is the situation there.

KOPPEL: Well, I assume you've been watching American television reports and reading American newspaper reports. SANCHEZ-PARODI: Well, that's a country where thousands of American troops are armed, and I, I cannot think that anyone can express themselves freely under those circumstances.

KOPPEL: Oh, I don't know. Our allies seem to feel quite free to express themselves as freely as they want; 108 folks voted against us. Perhaps...(inaudible)

SANCHEZ-PARODI: There were not American troops there at the UN general assembly today.

KOPPEL: No, not at the general assembly, but a great many American troops....

SANCHEZ-PARODI: Well, then, perhaps that would be a different way.

KOPPEL: A great many American troops are stationed in some of those countries. I mean, if your point is that American troops are, are able to coerce people....

SANCHEZ-PARODI: Not only because they are a station. They are occupying the country completely, even they are occupying the country. KIRKPATRICK: Of course, we let Mr. Parodi appear on our television. Mr. Parodi's been referring to censorship and public opinion. One wishes we could be sure that this discussion would appear tonight in Cuba and that we could do it in Spanish. SANCHEZ-PARODI: You can, you can be sure that that could be done. In fact, in fact, American officials have always had, denied and wouldn't allow Cuban journalists to interview them or, or, or even to come to United States.

KOPPEL: Well, ah, Mr. Sanchez-Parodi, I guess this offers me a golden opportunity. If you would like, if you would like to show this program, we'll give you the videotape, and you just give us the assurance it'll be shown on Cuban television.

KIRKPATRICK: And, and we could do it in Spanish. SANCHEZ-PARODI: Or we can invite Ambassador Kirkpatrick down there to have a discussion. KIRKPATRICK: And Ambassador Sozano, huh?

KOPPEL: You don't even have to invite her; you can do it all by satellite. Would you like to have it? SANCHEZ-PARODI: That would be interesting.

CONTINUED

5

KOPPEL: Would you do it? SANCHEZ-PARODI: That would be interesting. I'm not the one that handle the, the, the Cuban television enterprises. I'm not the one. I cannot impose a decision on that.

KOPPEL: Well, you.... SANCHEZ-PARODI: I can only say that it would be very interesting.

KOPPEL: You'll be sure to let us know when you get a response, won't you?
SANCHEZ-PARODI: Thank you, of course.

KOPPEL: What then, in summary, have we learned from this discussion this evening? There, there, there still seems to be the notion, I mean, you keep talking about the invasion, although the Americans are about to leave. SANCHEZ-PARODI: Well, this has been an invasion. They, they, they have been saying that they are going to leave, but we have not seen them leave yet.

KOPPEL: You're, you're, you're quite correct in picking me up on that. I don't mean the invasion; I mean the occupation. I mean the occupation appears to be over, and it appears to have been about 10 days long. SANCHEZ-PARODI: It will be over, it will be over when the American troops withdraw from the country. KIRKPATRICK: The occupation was by the Cubans. The rescue mission is by the Americans. SANCHEZ-PARODI: There were not Cuban troops. KIRKPATRICK: And almost immediately.... SANCHEZ-PARODI: There were no Cuban troops. There were never Cuban troops in Grenada. KIRKPATRICK: ...everybody is going to leave and let the Grenadians exercise self-determination. SANCHEZ-PARODI: The only troops, foreign troops that have come by force even into, into Grenada and without any declaration of war or anything like that, just by surprise and, in, in, in the shadows overnight were the American troops. KIRKPATRICK: But not by...(inaudible)